

Testimony prepared by:

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**Zoning Commission Notice of Public Roundtable – Z.C. Case No. 22-RT1**

Good afternoon, Chair Hood and Zoning Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on the racial equity analysis tool, which is a tremendous step in ensuring that future developments create opportunities across lines of race and class for residents in the District of Columbia.

My name is LaToya Thomas, Principal & Founder of Brick & Story, a Ward 7-based consulting practice focused on intentional stakeholder engagement and creative storytelling practices in the built environment space. Today, I am speaking on behalf of HAND (Housing Association of Nonprofit Developers) through my role as their Housing Indicator Tool Policy Consultant.

For background, HAND is a nonprofit membership association comprised of over 450 organizations working across the private, public and nonprofit sectors to collaborate in the production and preservation of affordable housing in the Capital Region of Baltimore, Washington, and Richmond. Through education, engagement and regional advocacy, HAND builds the capacity of its diverse membership to support the development of sustainable communities for individuals and families at all income levels. HAND is also a member of the Housing Priorities Coalition, which includes organizations like the Coalition for Smarter Growth and Enterprise Community Partners, that was formed to help guide the updates to the Comprehensive Plan.

Beginning in 2021, HAND introduced the Housing Indicator Tool (HIT) to the region as a way to track our region's progress towards meeting our affordable housing production targets. Aside from the annual review of production progress, central to the HIT is its focus on racial equity and the role that housing and, more broadly, effective and thoughtful development, plays in creating opportunity for social and economic mobility. We know the many ways in which zoning and land use policies have prevented many people - particularly people of color - from accessing housing and, as a result, other resources such as quality schools, parks, groceries, and retail. We see the Zoning Commission's Racial Equity Tool as a clear first step in beginning to right many of these historic wrongs that still permeate today.

HAND supports the use of the Racial Equity Tool to achieve greater equity through future land use and development decisions. Additionally, based on our review of the tool in partnership with other

organizations in the Housing Priorities Coalition, we recommend the following enhancements to ensure that the tool is truly meeting its intended purpose:

1. Be specific in the questions asked, and ask for detailed explanations. For example, when we look at whether or not a project is causing displacement, clearly define what is meant by displacement. If a temporary or permanent relocation is planned, ask for an explanation of the intended approach so that we better understand how affected families will be impacted in the short- or long-term.
2. When we look at housing opportunities being created by future developments, it is important to get clarity on income mix. The District has made affordable housing a priority, and at HAND, we are deeply focused on ensuring that the production pipeline for affordable housing units, particularly for those at the low and middle income bands, is met as quickly as possible since we know that is where the greatest need and uncertainty lies. How does future development address the incorporation of 30%, 50%, and 60% AMI units, for example?
3. Last but not least, the goal of new development is not only to improve the existing urban fabric, but also to create opportunities today that hopefully create opportunities for the future. This paradigm carries through not only to housing, but also to the many other supporting uses that accompany many larger scale developments; retail, green space, and art/cultural spaces are key to ensuring high quality civic life. The Racial Equity Tool can evaluate if proposed uses create opportunities that both future and existing residents can benefit from, as well as ensure that spaces that are designed reflect a diverse representation of the city's population and welcome people from all walks of life to engage with them.

To close, we applaud the Zoning Commission for developing the Racial Equity Tool, as we see this as progress towards achieving the type of equitable development that so many of us have been fighting for for so long. We encourage you to be bold in your questioning of projects that come to the Commission for review and leverage this tool to ensure that new development creates equitable opportunities for all residents.

Thank you again for your time and attention today, and I welcome any questions you may have.